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ABSTRACT

This profile of the English language teaching situation in Hungary discusses the role of English within Hungarian society and within the educational system. It is noted that English is taught as the main foreign language after Russian and that it is offered mainly in the gymnasiums and on the university level. The composition of the teaching cadre is addressed as well as teaching materials. The state educational administration, the general framework of the educational system, development and planning activities in teaching English, and English outside the educational system are described, as well as British support, which is limited to the Cultural Exchange Program. The problems with commerical opportunities to study English due to a shortage of hard currency are noted. Short discussions are given of the limited amount of creative writing in English and of the current research situation. A concluding statement examines the interest in English evidenced by enrollment in English classes outside the regular school system and the English proficiency reached by scientists. It is concluded that the situation is not gloomy even though English is just an optional second foreign language in the gymnasium only. A bibliographic note is included. (AMH)

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THE BRITISH COUNCIL
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DIVISION

ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Hungary **Date: April 1983**

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

English is taught in Hungary as the main foreign language after Russian. German is more widely used by the older generation, but more students now learn English than German at the secondary and tertiary levels. All children in secondary schools learn Russian, while English is one of the foreign language options in the gymnasium. Hungarians are encouraged to learn foreign languages in order to minimise the isolating effects of speaking only Hungarian, a difficult and little-known European language. Salary incentives are offered for English proficiency, and in the scientific world papers published in English can bring a financial bonus. This applies to other languages also.

English is only used as a medium of instruction in the university English departments. It is not used as a study language in education, except among research workers, who read widely in English.

Many Hungarians read English books in the original for pleasure, but they remain a minority. The journal Nagyvilág regularly carries reviews of English books and translated excerpts from them. The New Hungarian Quarterly is published in English and covers the cultural and educational fields, with many articles pertaining to Britain. Certain other official publications (eg Hungarofilm Bulletin) are published in English. Hungarian authors very rarely write in English.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Pre-primary and primary education. It is rare to find English taught to pre-school children. A few primary schools in the second cycle (10-13 years) run voluntary language classes, eg five lessons a fortnight.

Secondary education. There are three kinds of school: the Gimnázium (gymnasium or grammar school, 14-18 years), the Secondary Technical School (Szakközépiskola - 14-18 years) and the Secondary School for Vocational Skills (Szakmunkásképző Iskola).

About 20% of secondary school pupils go to a gymnasium and of these about 70% go on to university. The gymnasium offers the most academic type of secondary education. Russian is the first foreign language and pupils may choose one other, usually English, French or German, with three lessons a

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week. In 1981 52% chose English. The second foreign language is taught for two years and then becomes optional, although 80% usually continue for the next two years. The final examination (érettségi) is the minimum qualification for university entrance.

About 30% of children attend a secondary technical school. Each school specialises in a main discipline/vocation, eg economics, agriculture, music, art. Russian is compulsory and only a few of these schools offer English. Again the final examination (érettségi) is the minimum qualification for university entrance.

About 50% of children attend a secondary school for vocational skills, where the course lasts two or three years. No English instruction is offered.

As a new development in 1981, eleven grammar schools were chosen to offer intensive English for eight hours a week instead of the usual three.

Tertiary education. In the universities, English is studied for a joint degree with one other subject for five years. The last year is a teacher training year. There are English Departments at the Universities of Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged and Pécs. English Departments exist in one teacher training college and at the College of Foreign Trade, an important institution for English teaching. English is also offered at the specialised universities (eg Agriculture, Economics) as an optional subject. It is not uncommon to find large numbers of students in the pure and applied sciences who study English for the first time at the university, althogh they rarely achieve a high level of proficiency.

Adult education. There is widespread provision for adults to learn English. The English courses at TIT (Tudományos Ismeretterjesztő Társulat) are mainly evening classes. The Centre for Further Training in Foreign Languages (Idegennyelvi Továbbképző Központ) has teaching as well as testing functions, eg one-year courses of evening classes at nine hours a week, mostly for privately funded students. Several ministries offer special English language training (eg the Ministry of Foreign Trade) to their officials.

Correspondence Courses. English cannot be learnt by correspondence in Hungary.

Teacher Training. (Pre-service and in-service). Training for English teachers in secondary schools is part of the five-year English degree course at university, the fifth year being devoted to pedagogics and to teaching practice. Teachers qualify for two subjects through the joint degree system.

Graduates in English from teacher training colleges (four-year course) are qualified to teach English in primary schools.

For in-service training part-time courses, lasting for one year and consisting of one day a week for twelve participants, are run by the Pedagogical Institute in the capital city (Fővárosi Pedagógiai Intézet). Similar courses are organised by the National Pedagogical Institute (OPI) for teachers from the rest of the country. There are three national summer courses for teachers of English. The British Council, through the Cultural Exchange Programme, provides the Director of Studies, tutors, books and materials for one of these.

Professional associations and organisations. Apart from the teachers' trade union, there is no association for English teachers. Some teachers of English

attend the international meetings of IATEFL, the International Association for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language.

English examinations. The state examination in English, at medium and high levels, is conducted by the Centre for Further Training in Foreign Languages. Success can lead to increases in salary or language allowances. British-based examinations, such as the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English, are rarely used. However, testing is conducted by the Cultural Attaché for those travelling to Britain for long-term study.

English is not a formal requirement for university entrance. About 25% of school leavers speak English at pre-intermediate level.

Responsibility for syllabuses and choice of textbooks. Syllabuses and textbooks for the various kinds of secondary school are controlled by the Ministry of Culture and Education. The English textbook for a given year in a given type of school follows the specified syllabus. In higher education these responsibilities are delegated to the teaching institutions who print their own textbooks and materials, and import British books as far as their budgets allow.

Inspection. English teaching in Budapest schools is inspected by two inspectors based on the Pedagogical Institute for the capital (FPI). One or two inspectors of English operate in each county. Inspectors base their reports on the effectiveness of English teaching in a school rather than on individual teachers, but they can recommend in-service training where they see a need for it. An English inspection must take place every three years.

English in the universities. Four Hungarian universities offer English as a main subject (see above). The number of students studying English in the four universities is approximately 800. A knowledge of English literature, from Old English onwards, is part of the syllabus and is closely related to the teaching of the language. Students are expected to read so many texts that they often read in translation. A critical study of one text in depth is rare. What is required is wide, but often superficial, knowledge.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP). There is a postgraduate interpreters' course lasting one or two years. Technical universities and the Karl Marx University of Economics offer ESP, although not with great expertise.

Radio and Television. There are programmes, although not extensive, on radio and television including the BBC TV series Follow Me. Foreign feature films on TV are dubbed into Hungarian so there is little opportunity to hear native speakers. There is no distance learning.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

The supply of teachers more than meets the demand, with most of them wanting to work in Budapest. The majority of English teachers are women.

There are four Council-appointed British university lektors and one school teacher. In addition, three or four expatriates married to Hungarians work in universities or teacher-training colleges as locally engaged lektors. At present there is no room for increased British participation in teacher-training.

The facilities for initial and further training, and also professional organisations, were dealt with in the previous section.

4. TEACHING MATERIALS

All textbooks produced for schools are authorised by the Ministry and published in Hungary. Foreign-produced materials may be used if they complement the official textbook.

Imported British books are available but, even though they have a minimal mark-up price, they are much more expensive than Hungarian books. University students use English libraries extensively.

Materials written and produced within a university are widely used, and there is increasing use of cassettes. Hungarian textbooks often have accompanying cassettes recorded by native speakers. The use of films is limited, for logistical and other reasons.

A wide range of English literature exists in translation at very cheap prices.

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

The Minister of Culture and Education is responsible for the provision of public education, including universities. It is within his authority to determine admission, curriculum, and the writing and publication of textbooks. The administration of primary and secondary schools is in the hands of county or city councils. There are in addition ten grammar schools run by the Roman Catholic Church. The National Pedagogical Institute (OPI) of the Ministry of Education acts as a research and in-service training centre for the whole country (except Budapest which operates its own in-service training). OPI organises annual summer schools for language teachers including the British Council summer school. The inspection of schools is the responsibility of local councils. Subject inspectors are usually school teachers who teach eight to ten hours a week in addition to their work as inspectors.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The importance of Western foreign languages is being given increasing recognition by the authorities. New guidelines have meant smaller classes and revision of textbooks. The methodology now stresses structures rather than rules, with more emphasis on spoken English and listening comprehension.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

New regulations permit the establishment of private schools, which have mushroomed since 1981. A permit must be obtained but there is as yet no inspection system. Many teachers of English offer private lessons in their homes.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

This forms part of the Cultural Exchange Programme. In summary, the following support is provided:

- Four lektors and one school teacher (Benefit, contracted by the British Council)
  Local salary is paid by the Ministry of Culture
- One-year scholarship in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) to a Hungarian university teacher of English.
- Two five-month bursaries for English studies.
- One place on the Cambridge English Studies Seminar.
- The provision of five TEFL specialists for an annual summer school in Hungary.
- Thirty-nine awards annually for Hungarian teachers of English to attend British Council Summer Schools in the UK.
- Six awards of one month each to non-specialists for English tuition in the UK.
- Fifteen places for Hungarian undergraduates to spend one month each at summer schools in the UK.
- A special course in the UK for twenty-two Hungarian undergraduates studying English.
- Support material from the library (10,000 volumes): films, cassettes, records, posters, slides.
- A series of film shows in the Embassy Hall once a week from October to April; weekly attendance, 150.
- Occasional lectures given by the Cultural Attaché and Assistant Cultural Attaché at universities.
- An annual conference of lektors (7) held in the Embassy (one day only) for the exchange of professional experience. No papers are produced.

There is no Direct Teaching of English nor any possibility of it.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

This is a limited operation. America provides no lektors but one Fulbright Professor annually, who usually covers American literature. They have a small lending library and hold one annual summer school for Hungarian teachers of English. There are friendly relations between the British and US cultural sections but no potential for cooperation; they have different objectives.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

Nil.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Commercial opportunities are very limited, their main difficulty being the shortage of hard currency. A few Hungarians, particularly those with relatives in Britain, attend private schools of English in the UK (information

supplied by the local British library) but there is no potential for an extension of this. Nor opportunities for the establishment of a British language school or the use of consultancy services. Hardware is used but it comes from East European sources.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

None is produced in English by Hungarians but much is available in translation. There is a Hungarian Association of Writers and an active PEN club, both with close international contacts. PEN invites at least one British writer or playwright per year to Hungary. There are no literary societies dedicated to British writers, but most educated Hungarians read some English novels either in the original or in translation. No literary prizes for works in English. Hungary has an excellent publishing system and produces high quality books at low prices. Some agreements exist between Hungarian and British publishers; Deutsch, Longmans, OUP, Phaidon, and Hurst (inter alia) have local contacts, but arrangements tend to be ad hoc.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

Research in English language and literature is undertaken in the English departments of universities. Not usually as team projects but by individuals and mainly in literature and linguistics, little in methodology. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences, through the post-doctoral degrees it offers (kandidátus), also provides a framework for lecturers who wish to continue their research. The library facilities of the University National Library and the Academy of Sciences are very good.

Links with foreign institutions are informal and related to student exchanges rather than research. The annual awards in English studies are listed in Section 8. There is no register of research projects.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Information is to be found only in legislation, regulations and schedules, where there is nothing easily extractable or highly relevant. There are no relevant annual reports, commissions or reviews.

There are not many recent books or articles, and those which exist are written in Hungarian. A useful review by Miklós Kontra of English and American studies in the 1970s, (written from the viewpoint of a university lecturer with American experience) was published in 1980 as the first volume in a series of Papers in English and American Studies, by the University of Szeged (Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae).

15. **GENERAL STATEMENT**

Although Russian is the compulsory foreign language in schools English is the most popular of the second foreign languages offered in the gymnasium, followed closely by German. However this covers only 20% of the secondary schools. Pupils attending secondary technical schools (30%) find they need English when they are at the university, and undertake language tuition on a semi-voluntary ad hoc basis. Nevertheless many reach a standard which enables them to read scientific texts. The large enrolments for English at adult education classes, and the extensive use made of private schools and teachers, indicate the interest in English among adults. On the whole teaching in schools is satisfactory but teachers display weaknesses in spoken and colloquial English. Not many have spent an extended time in an English-speaking country and they have few opportunities to hear the native speaker, even in the mass media. A most encouraging development has been the introduction of intensive English at eleven specially chosen grammar schools. Pupils in these schools are taught by the best teachers and reach a high standard of proficiency in two years.

The shortage of hard currency in Hungary and the very high cost of living in Britain mean that very few Hungarians can spend their holidays/join language courses in Britain. Professional people in the pure and applied sciences, although they start English late, often reach high standards through frequent attendance at international conferences, for which funds are available from official sources. The popularity of the Council's library in the British Embassy (20,000 borrowings annually from a store of 10,000 volumes, tapes and cassettes) and the capacity audiences at the weekly film shows are highly encouraging. So is the large number of children whose parents (usually from the professional classes) pay for them to have private lessons in English at the primary and secondary school stages. The situation is not gloomy even though English is not a first foreign language but an optional second foreign language in the gymnasium only. It is the most popular foreign language, particularly among the young, although German is the most useful language for a tourist visiting Hungary.